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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the crisis facing American education, comprised of professional unrest, student disruption and dissatisfaction, irrelevant curricula, financial distress, and need for reform. The resolution of this crisis depends on the creativity and courage of American educators. Changes could be brought about by an enlightened educational leadership that would bring together the thinkers, doers, gradual reformers, and radical reformers. Educational leadership must, among other things, continue agitation for increased Federal funds. (JF)

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CRISIS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP:

A DANGEROUS OPPORTUNITY

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National Academy for School Executives
(American Association of School Administrators)
Atlantic City, New Jersey
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Let me begin by concurring with the present consensus among educators that this is a time of crisis in education. But then let me recall that the history of education has been punctuated by periodic crises of many kinds. Eight years ago yesterday, for example, I came to this city to speak to your parent organization, the American Association of School Administrators, about educational needs of that day that were causing me great concern. Standard education, it seemed to me then, was crying out for creative ideas and new directions. I was concerned with the kind of education we were providing our children, but I was even more concerned with what we were not providing. In too many cases, where new ideas were available, there seemed to be inadequate public and political support to implement them--especially in government funding.

That was a time of crisis that we related chiefly to financial need. We felt then that we could solve our problems if the states would appropriate greater sums and if only the federal government would help by sharing its vast financial resources. Then some federal money came -- for a while a lot of it came -- but the crisis has only been aggravated. And the cry again today is that we need more and steadier federal support -- which we do. But that alone will not be enough, and that alone cannot resolve our crisis.

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The late President Kennedy once observed that the Chinese depict the word "crisis" by combining their symbols for two other words: "danger" and "opportunity". It seems to me that we in education may have been fearing and focussing too closely on the dangers in our present crisis, to the point that we have overlooked many of its opportunities.

There are several facets of our present crisis. Certainly our fiscal needs are important. But perhaps they appear disproportionately more important, just because they coincide with a growing movement across the country for a fundamental restructuring of education. This coincidence has accentuated our shortage of money, and it has caught us right in the middle. Just as we clearly perceive the desperate urgency for transforming our educational practices, we see our resources being steadily reduced -- by governmental cutbacks, by rising school costs, by the insatiable appetite of inflation, and by variations of these and other factors.

The evidence is literally all around us. Around the country there have been cutbacks in construction, in operations, in personnel, in employee and student benefits, in extracurricular activities, and at some places even in classes. And still the fiscal problems are so severe that some school systems are in very real jeopardy of having to stop operating.

The money squeeze affects all regions, and it hits suburban as well as urban systems. The New York City system, for instance, is trying to stave off a projected $50 million deficit, while the nearby suburban system in New Rochelle is announcing that it may have to close schools for lack of funds. And those of you who are from here in New Jersey are familiar with the miserable financial condition of the Newark schools.

Nor does it seem to do much good to take the issue to the people these days. Voters are turning down school-bond issues in record numbers. Among the more serious defeats were those in four suburban St. Louis school districts,

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where voters consistently rejected proposed school taxes, until schools serving 46,000 pupils were forced to close for varying periods of time. And the prospect for finding support among voters seems even dimmer when we read about the emergence of more than 23,000 well-organized tax-protest groups around the country, claiming memberships totaling about two million.

Nor has it done much good to take the issue to higher levels of government. State support has been adversely affected by factors ranging from revenue shortages to anti-student emotions among legislators. And the National Education Association reported that federal support for education in 1969 was cut back by $26 million under the figure for 1968, the second successive annual reduction.

On top of all that, if the education economy lags behind the national economy by about 18 months, as has been theorized, then we can expect our extreme fiscal woes to be around at least until late 1972.

But as serious as our financial problems are, they are only one area in which American education finds itself in trouble now. A factor in our money shortage has been the defeat of numerous bond issue referenda, which reflects the troubles we are having with parents and our other constituents. Especially in the ghettos, parents have been quite vocal in expressing their dissatisfaction with schools.

We are also in trouble with our own colleagues, the teachers. In 1969-70, the NEA reports, there were a record number of 180 teacher strikes around the country. Moreover, an annual survey of our nation's teachers indicates that each year a greater percentage of them supports the view that teacher strikes are indeed justifiable. Today nearly 3 out of every 4 teachers believe that in at least some circumstances teachers should strike. In 1965, only about half the teachers held this opinion.

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Most significantly, we are having troubles in our relationships with students. In some cases, the conflicts expand into disruptions. The National Association of Secondary School Principals surveyed schools in our 45 largest cities, and found that more than half of them reported student disruptions over the two-year period, 1967-69. Some of these began as conflicts among students, rather than between students and faculty; but the point is that the epidemic of student disruptions has spread from college campuses to infect too many of our high schools.

Of course this period of our national history is already being distinctly marked by such distress as generational conflict, overt racial hostility, and political polarization. So it should hardly be surprising that our schools -- which represent one of society's most pervasive institutions -- should be having perplexing problems in the field of human relations, even including disruptive behavior by students.

But we must emphasize here that disruptive students are not by any means the only students who are dissatisfied with our schools. An upcoming NEA staff report, titled Schools for the 70's -- and Beyond, says, "Today's students are saying that they don't want to learn what their parents learned, no matter how cleverly the old is dressed up in new garb." Even the more conservative educators among us are concerned with this student attitude, and realize that we must respond to it.

While we are not likely to agree on a common response, I would like to take note of a general trend that seems to be emerging. That trend seems to lead from the higher offices of school systems down through the administrations of separate schools, to the teachers within their own classrooms and ultimately to the individual students. It is expressed in the current and growing revision of traditional roles within education, which arises partly from technological advances but more importantly from changing educational philosophies. In

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other words, reform might well be advanced by those professional educators who reach back toward subordinate levels of the educational heirarchy to seek out more creative input from people at all levels.

The natural consequence of such a pattern, ultimately, is to place more responsibility on each student for his own education. Simultaneously, it encourages educators from every level to broaden their educational vision beyond the thin line of their immediate and traditionally official duties. In short, it brings more educational people -- from students to teachers to administrators -- into active involvement with the real life business of designing, executing, and learning from educational practices. And it insists that we all remember that education must serve the students, not the other way around. We might even call it a trend toward "education from a child's point of view."

This new trend owes much to some once-controversial figures, including earlier reformers like Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori, and John Dewey, and including contemporary thinkers like A.S. Neill, John Holt, and others (although obviously none of us here are always going to agree with these people; after all, they don't always agree among themselves). Beyond that, the trend is indebted to many teachers who have spent their time more in practice than in theory, who may not have written anything more than their own grant proposals, and whose projects are therefore better known than their names.

And it reaches back to numerous teachers <u>of</u> teachers, who imbued their students with the inspired desire to re-transmit culture and information to their own students in open and effective ways. Harry D. Gideonse, the chancellor of the New School for Social Research, likes to remember one such teacher who influenced him. When Dr. Gideonse took his first teaching position at Columbia, he went to see the college dean "who was a gifted teacher interested in teaching. ..I remember asking the dean," Dr. Gideonse recalls, "whether there was anything that he could recommend that I might read on

teaching and methods of teaching. He hemmed and hawed a bit and said, 'You know, there are shelves of books on that, Harry, shelves of books. All they really tell you is the same basic, simple idea, and the idea can be put into just one sentence: Teach where the class is, not where you are.'" And that still may be the easiest one-sentence umbrella under which we can gather our various ideas on reform today.

Although that general proposition finds general acceptance, we still cannot make up our collective mind about what form the reform should take. The paths that have been proposed often seem dimly lit, and in some cases are barely defined. Some paths seem to run in several directions at once, and others just seem to run out. Some paths seem to lead deeper into the woods rather than out of them, raising more educational questions than they answer. And that, to draw the circle full, has greatly intensified our present crisis.

So the crisis we face today in American education is a compound crisis, involving human relations, professional unrest, student disruption and dissatisfaction, irrelevant curricula, and a desperate need for reform -- as well as financial distress. Yet I believe the crisis is organic, and that it will respond to organic therapy. And at this point I would like to be able to advocate something simple, like more money, or a grand national plan, but I don't believe that would solve our problems. I believe the transformation of American education depends fundamentally on the creativity and courage of American educators. And once that is properly and publicly exercised, I think the necessary funds will be forthcoming, and so will the solution to our crisis.

As Frank Gerhardt wrote in Educational Leadership two years ago, "We must practice what we teach, and this includes uncovering problems, encountering conflicts, honoring the problems that promote dissent, and most of all, practicing the skills of inquiry, creativity, and human inter-action

within task-oriented activities." Along such a path of leadership lies the way out of our crisis.

Of course it will require leadership from fields other than education. It will take conjunctive leadership from school board members, from other local officials, from state legislators, from governors and appointed state officials, from members of Congress and certainly from the executive branch of our federal government -- most importantly from the President of the United States. But the responsibility for stimulating this political leadership lies basically with professional educators. We must motivate all the rest; we must lead the leaders.

Two years ago, George W. Angell wrote in the NASSP Bulletin, "Leadership for transformation is a rare skill, but each of us must begin his own transformation from being an 'authoritative educator' to becoming an 'educational authority'. . . Power is generated by the very act of leadership. And by the same token, the authority of a powerful office may be eroded by the lack of leadership....The most significant characteristic of education is not its resistance to change, but its inability to produce educational leadership for change." The bright hope of today, however, I believe, is that we have produced educational leadership capable of effecting the changes that American education desperately needs, the changes that our society must realize are vital to its own welfare.

If we look at how far we have come since a very few years ago, we can feel encouraged about the opportunities that lie ahead. Look at the number of experimental learning programs, for instance, or at the programs in educational research that have sprung up in all sections of the country. Look at the efforts being made to involve such groups as teachers and parents in educational policy-making, from the teachers' councils which govern curricular matters in Winchester, Massachusetts, across the country to

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California's pilot PPBS projects. Look at such hopeful innovations as the new multi-racial history syllabus developed by the NAACP, or the variety of programs in compensatory education. Look at last week's action by the New York City Board of Education, which will hold schools and their staffs accountable for the success or failure of their educational efforts. Look at the work of the Education Commission of the States, which recently published the first in a projected series of reports from its National Assessment of Educational Progress. Look at the growing number of citizens' advisory committees operating within local school systems; the National Citizens Advisory Commission for the Public Schools reports that the humber spurted from 150 in 1960 to about 18,000 last year. Look at yourselves meeting here for your second annual National Academy. A catalogue of such promising developments could go on and on.

Admittedly, such progress as we have made has been painfully shackled by our financial problems, but for the sake of our continued progress, we must realize how much is possible within limited budgets. And since we know that our financial condition will remain critical for some time to come, we must carefully avoid rationalizing for our shortcomings simply by pointing to our short-fundings. Instead, we must dedicate ourselves with even greater fervor to developing programs that move us closer toward the real transformation of American education. It simply means that we have an even larger responsibility to our own society in its own time than any of our forerunners had.

This is a time for enlightened educational leadership. We need to bring together the thinkers, the doers, the feelers, the activists, the gradual reformers, the radical reformers, and the revolutionaries. We need to involve anyone who will attract or seek out or conceive creative ideas, who can try and experiment and try again and accomplish. We want to

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feed into the channels of creative response all the available or conceivable bright ideas and jolting ideas and revolutionary ideas. That is the raw material with which we will compose the transformation of American education.

This is not an easy task. Leadership is your burden, and your leadership is the hope of education, and therefore the hope of the nation. We must concede to the earlier reformers among us that we were indeed too slow to hear and react to their porposals, and we are still obviously tardy in undertaking root changes. But at last we have the will, the collective conviction, the creativity, the human concern, the intelligence, the experience, and the courage to take action, to truly mold a new kind of American education.

As I see it, the goal admits of no easy national solution. There is no simple route to follow -- not through greater funding, not through a larger federal agency, not through programmatic plans. There are, however, obvious national vehicles that we must mount if we are ever to get on the road. The most obvious, I believe, regards federal funding for education.

During the decade of the 1960's, the push for educational support was directed at local and state revenues. But these sources are no longer adequate, as we have seen. There are, after all, some valid reasons for their having become unreliable -- such as inequities in and among local tax structures. Poor school districts, for instance, are doubly handicapped if they undertake improvement of their educational system. Besides having twice the distance to go to reach standard quality, they bear a greater personal tax burden to achieve comparable improvements. A hundred-dollar yearly salary increase per teacher may cost $6 per family in a poor school district, compared to $2.50 per family in another district.

Besides, local and state tax collections have grown by 63.6 per cent in the last five years to meet rising school costs! By now, more than half our total school revenues come from local sources, with nearly 40 per cent

more coming from the states. Less than 7-1/2 per cent is provided by federal sources, less than 7-1/2 cents on every dollar. And as the popular song by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross expressed it,"7-1/2 cents doesn't buy a heck of a lot."

The National Education Finance Project, a little-known program operating in Florida and funded by the Office of Education, recently indicated that it may campaign for re-alignment of the educational tax burden, reducing local and state support to approximately two-thirds, with the federal government increasing its proportion to at least 30 per cent -- or more than quadruple its present proportion. The Project pointed out that heavy reliance on property taxes for educational funding may have been equitable in a rural society where most income derived from farms and property. But this is not so today when only 9 per cent of the national income derives from property, and 71 per cent comes from wages. As Dr. Roe L. Johns, the project director, pointed out, "It's unrealistic to expect an old tax system to finance modern educational needs."

If, however, there is to be a change in this structure that will bring us in tune with our own times, then you yourselves must provide political as well as educational leadership towards that goal. Of course there is always a certain danger inherent in getting involved in the political arena from a professional interest, especially in a time of political polarization. It could, for instance, hand a cheap weapon to any opportunist who might oppose your educational ambition, if he should think he could discredit your motives by calling them "political". Recalcitrant tax-fighters, too, may accuse you of"meddling" in politics, but that should only expose their own real motives. And we must not be intimidated by such attitudes. Again, we must not let the dangers of our crisis blind us to its opportunities.

Do not doubt for a moment the propriety of incorporating political involvement into your professional duties. You are, after all, political

people, in every best sense of the word. You are political leaders. You are sowing ideas, creating new and better social conditions, moving people who are slow to be moved. Now we must turn our politicians into educators. As it was expressed by the NEA Office of Governmental Relations and Citizenship: "First, educators must convince elected officials that good education is good politics!"

We must make government realize that educational welfare relates directly and vitally to the most urgent, most immediate problems of our society. Some recent analyses of American life, in fact, have suggested that we might more accurately divide the polarization in our society along educational, rather than generational or political or racial lines. The Census Bureau, for one, supported the idea of an "education gap" by noting that the percentage of our population completing high school has virtually doubled since 1940. It also reported that the fathers of nearly two-thirds of all present college students did not themselves go beyond high school.

In this cognizance, there is no other insitution in American life that so directly relates to all the people and to all our problems as does education. Government, of course, should; and it obviously could, if only by providing the support it properly owes to education.

But as we agitate for greater federal support, we must make clear that we will resist the hope that some mighty federal solution will roll away all the troubles of education. Education is too complex, too constantly demanding, too ever-changing to submit to regimented or even unregimented federal direction. In fact, education is too valuable and vital to our society today to entrust it to the federal government or any other all-knowing source of direction. It will require all the brains and all the energy of all the unhampered and outspoken educational leaders we can find in all parts of our country. And chief above all, every one of you here must work on it,

exercising individual leadership, exchanging experiences, starting untried things and stopping unproductive things, stealing ideas, swapping information.

My theory is that education today needs this kind of massive and somewhat unstructured input. That was the concept behind the Education Commission of the States, and it is the idea behind the founding of the National Academy for School Executives.

It is a tough assignment that you have laid out for yourselves: stirring up stagnation, kicking down inertia, practicing the skills of inquiry and creativity and human interaction. But we already have pointed to evidence tonight that you are capable of doing it. Without being intimidated by the obvious dangers that are present in our current crisis, we can immediately and confidently take advantage of our historic opportunity to help shape the character of our society and of its destiny. The age of the ivory tower is long past for American educators, and we have no excuse for remaining aloof from any aspect of American life, whether educational or social or political. Indeed, such involvement falls to us now as a duty -- a duty to the students we are charged to educate, a duty to the society that we hope to save, a duty to the living institution of education.

Overcoming our present crisis, through this kind of educational leadership, we can turn education's immeasurable capabilities toward reconciling the various factions in our society, toward redirecting the incredibly complex factors which threaten the very existence of life on this planet, and toward the promise of a more civilized life for everyone on it.

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